

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street, Phoenix AZ 85012
Thursday – March 12, 2009

M I N U T E S

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Yamanouchi.

Present:

Advisory Commissioners

Kenneth Yamanouchi, Chairman
Linda Fulkerson, Vice Chairwoman
Thomas Heaney
Gary Fredricks
Phillip Quochytewa Sr.
Larry McKim
Bill Lunsford
Terrie Gent
George Cushing

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Joey Strickland, Director
Lee Borgen, Veterans' Benefits Counselor
Tom Creager, AZ State Veteran Home
Administrator
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Plans

Absent: none

Guests: none

Opening: Chairman Yamanouchi opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. with appropriate ceremony.

Minutes: The minutes of February 12, 2009 were approved. (Moved by Commissioner McKim and seconded by Commissioner Cushing.)

Communications: None

Agency Announcements

1. Director Strickland

- Verbal and written confirmation have been received informing the agency that about 18 million stimulus dollars will be forthcoming for the veterans home in Tucson.
- Every effort must be made to ensure that the State's 10 million matching funds are included in the 2010 budget.
- Based on a veteran population of 180 thousand in the Tucson area, the home is projected to have 180 beds.
- The home will bring 7 to 8 million Federal dollars annually into the State's economy.
- The VA is going to meet with the Navajo Nation about a potential VA cemetery on reservation land.
- Everyone is very pleased with the Chinle VSD office.
- State agencies have been encouraged to develop contingency plans to accommodate potential 2010 budget cuts of 5 to 20%.
- Work at the Sierra Vista cemetery is progressing very nicely.
- The Troops to Teachers program is doing very well, although the program may get cut.
- The State approving Agency is doing fine.
- The VA will be administering the new GI Bill program instead of a civilian contractor.
- All deficiencies in the Home have been met and the Home is getting referrals from the VA. They are now waiting for the VHS survey.

- Commissioner Heaney noted that veterans in Sierra Vista do not like the Veterans' Benefits Counselor (VBC) office being in the cemetery administration building, but the VBC's prefer being there.
- The VBC's will stay at the cemetery and that client access will be from the back of the building to reduce client exposure to unrelated cemetery activities.
- The Tucson VBC office will be relocated to a more appropriate area of the city.

2. Tom Creager

- A detailed handout was provided that updated statistics on the Home and also gave information garnered during his attendance at the National Association of State Veteran Homes winter conference earlier this month.
- There are matching funds available to support training programs that are already in place.
- The VA is considering hiring an independent civilian survey company to conduct the annual survey of the Home. Since the company would be specialized it would provide a better quality survey and consistency over time.
- The current census reflects 155 residents.
- There is a continuing effort to reduce overtime and registry expenditures.

Region 3 meeting in Tucson 01/10/09/Review of follow up actions: Commissioner McKim announced that all pending issues have been addressed.

Region 2 meeting in Chinle 04/11/09

Commissioner Quochytewa

- Everything is on track for the meeting.
- He and Commissioner Heaney will go to Chinle on Thursday to assist with the final preparation.
- The Native American veterans' community wants a VA Regional Office representative at the region meeting, in addition to someone from VAMC Prescott.
- Commissioner Heaney reminded everyone that the reservation is on daylight saving time. They are now an hour ahead of the rest of Arizona.

Legislative Committee Report

1. Commissioner Fredricks

- There are 20 bills of interest to veterans currently in process. He provided a brief synopsis of the most relevant bills and noted that although the House is working the bills, the Senate is entirely focused on the budget.
- Effort is needed to call legislative attention to preserving the Agency's 2010 budget, protect the current number of VBC's and encourage timely confirmation of Director Strickland.

2. Commissioner Fulkerson

- The property tax exemption bill (SCR 1044) needs to be monitored for changes. Support should focus on ensuring that the bill reflects the recommendation of the Veterans' Research Council; incremental exemption based on the veteran's percent of service connected disability for pay purposes.
- Consider opposition to SB 1429, Arizona Medal of Honor, because it is too close to the US Medal of Honor and could diminish the significance of the US Medal of Honor. The Arizona Medal of Valor is sufficient.

3. Commissioner Heaney emphasized that Congresswoman Gabrielle Gifford continues to be very proactive on veteran issues. He solicited and encouraged open dialog between the Commission and her office to reduce the potential for duplication of effort.

4. Chairman Yamanouchi announced that the Legislative Committee will be a standing committee within the Advisory Commission. The current membership is Commissioner Fulkerson, Commissioner Fredricks and Commissioner Gent.

Finalize Legislative Recommendations for Governor Brewer

1. Commissioner Gent commented that HB 2495 needs to be monitored to ensure that the language of the bill is maintained to appropriately reflect the intent of the bill.

2. Commissioner Fredricks questioned how the Commission physically executes its duty to advise the Director and the Governor on proposed legislation. An extensive discussion ensued on how best to ensure that the Governor is kept informed of the Commission's concerns.

3. Commissioner Gent moved to send a letter to the Governor, with copies to the appropriate committee chairmen, recommending that the 2010 budget preserve the current VBC level, maintain the matching funds for the Tucson veteran home and that the Director be expeditiously confirmed for continuity of the Department's operation. Commissioner McKim seconded the motion. Extensive discussion for and against; the motion was not carried.

4. Chairman Yamanouchi reminded everyone that a letter was recently sent covering the issues in question; however it was also noted that no response has been received. After further dialogue, Commissioner Fulkerson moved "if a response to the existing letter was not received prior to the May Commission meeting, a new letter should be sent to the Governor, with a separate letter to the House and Senate leaders, reinforcing the views of the Commission." Commissioner McKim seconded the motion. The motion was approved based on the tie-breaker vote of Chairman Yamanouchi.

Outreach Program Committee Report

1. Commissioner McKim advised that the committee is working on an action plan for region meetings. The commissioners were asked to review the checklist and be prepared to comment at the May meeting.

2. Chairman Yamanouchi announced that the Outreach Program Committee will be a standing committee within the Advisory Commission. The current membership is Commissioner McKim, Commissioner Cushing and Commissioner Lunsford.

Approve Plan to Implement the Commission's Strategic Plan: Commissioner Fredricks provided the latest updates to the Advisory Commission Guidelines and reviewed them in some detail. The document will be finalized and distributed at the May meeting.

Commission Tri-fold Pamphlet Review

1. Commissioner Fredricks noted that the Commission Tri-fold does not reflect the new strategic plan. The current strategic plan should be incorporated when the Tri-fold is redone to reflect the new Commissioners that will come on board in July.

2. Chairman Yamanouchi observed that nominations for new Advisory Commission members are very slow. He reminded everyone that the nomination deadline is March 31st and encouraged the Commissioners to solicit applications from their respective areas.

Public comments: none

Comments for the good of the Commission: Commissioner McKim reminded everyone that the ceremony for the re-interment of the civil war soldiers' remains at the Southern Arizona Veteran Cemetery is scheduled for 10:00 a.m. on May 16, 2009. The ceremony should last about an hour

and fifteen minutes. The transfer of the caskets to the internment area will take place immediately after the ceremony.

Adjournment: Chairman Yamanouchi adjourned the meeting at 12:28 p.m. (Moved by Commissioner Fredricks and seconded by Commissioner Cushing.) The next meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. on April 11, 2009 in the Chinle Administration Building, Board Conference Room, on Highway 191 and Route 7, Chinle Arizona.

Respectfully submitted,

S. Lee Borgen
Secretary